

ADDRESS

OF

HON. JOHN S. PRESTON,

COMMISSIONER FROM SOUTH CAROLINA,

To the Convention of Virginia, February 19, 1861.

COLUMBIA, S. C.:

STEAM POWER-PRESS OF R. W. GIBBES.

1861.

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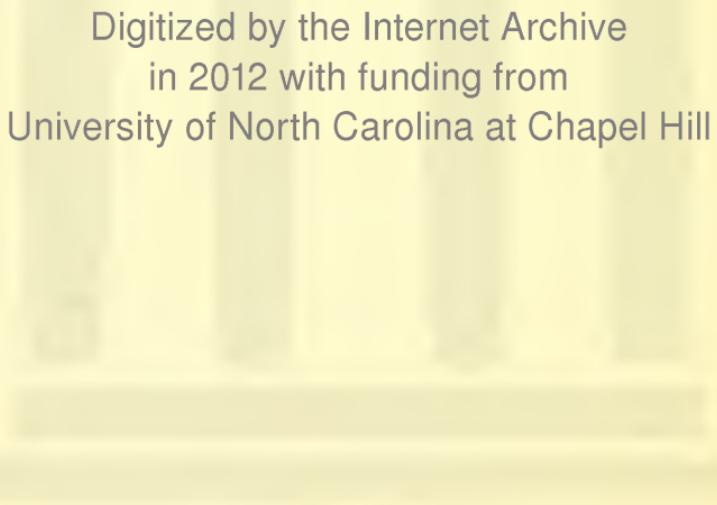
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ADDRESS.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of Virginia:

I have the honor to present to you my credentials as Commissioner from the Government of South Carolina to the Convention of the people of Virginia. On these credentials being duly received by you, I am instructed by my Government to lay before you the causes which induced the State of South Carolina to withdraw from the United States, and resume the powers heretofore delegated by her to the Government of the United States of America.

In performing this duty, I desire to announce to you that it is no part of my purpose, nor is it the wish of my Government, that I should make an argument before you in proof of the right of secession. My Government has assumed that right in her sovereign capacity, and my ministry here is to recite the causes which that Government has deemed sufficient to enforce upon her the necessity of exercising that right.

It will be sufficient for me to recall to your consideration a few historical facts, bearing upon the relations of the States composing the late American Confederation. You will remember that the American Colonies of Great Britain, save by contiguity of territory, had no nearer community of Government than they had with the Colonies of the East Indies. They were united in the Crown of Great Britain, and when that union was dissolved, each Colony was remitted to its own ministry, as completely as if they were in different regions of the Empire. Being adjacent, and having identical grievances, they met and consulted at different times and places, in various forms of convention, but generally in Congress, as of acknowledged independent powers. They began the war with the

mother country—each Colony for itself—and the battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill in Massachusetts, and of Fort Moultrie in South Carolina, and the burning of Norfolk in Virginia, preceded the declaration of the 4th of July, 1776. The Colonies then in Congress, on that day, declared themselves free and independent States, and proceeded to act as such in forming alliances with each other for their common defence against the power from which they had absolved themselves. They also instantly, and severally, began to form independent civil organizations. When these were completed as efficiently as circumstances would allow, and manifested by their separate contributions to the common cause, as sovereign and independent powers they formed a compact, in which this sovereignty and independence were expressly declared. As you may remember, gentlemen—for I am now reciting what is present to your memory, with a view to bring it to your consideration, trusting, as I may recite it, you will discover what has been certainly running through the minds of my people for years past—finding that, individually, they could not carry on this contest for independence and sovereignty, they united in certain articles, which are known as the Articles of Confederation. In these articles there is the reiteration of the original declaration of the sovereignty and independence of the parties to it. All rights, all powers, all jurisdiction, therein delegated, produce no limitation upon the ultimate and discretionary sovereignty of the parties to it. In the subsequent treaty with Great Britain, that Government recognized the agency of the Confederation, but acknowledged the States—severally, by name—as sovereign and independent States. Four years later, the sovereign parties became dissatisfied with the league, on account of alleged inefficiency in regard to interests which were common and identical. The States virtually resumed their original status of segregation, and the remedies proposed for the inefficiency of the Articles of Confederation resulted in the new compact, under the name of the Constitution of the United States and the Amendments

thereto, proposed by the States individually. In this instrument there is not one word or phrase capable of being construed into a lapse or prescription of the sovereignty and independence of the contracting powers. On the contrary, there is an express, pervading and emphatic reservation of all powers not expressly granted. The whole spirit and genius of that Constitution recognizes the sovereignty of the States, and its own mere agency in the exercise of deputed and limited functions. The States—separately, individually, independently—with various reservations, and at different periods of time, consented to this contract. Nothing legitimate has since occurred to change their relations to each other under this contract. On the contrary, the contemporaneous and juxtapo-contemporaneous construction, especially that of Virginia by Mr. Madison, characterized by your distinguished President the chief framer of the Constitution, declares that “the Constitution of the United States was formed by the sanction of the States, given by each in its sovereign capacity. * * * * The States, then, being the parties to the constitutional compact, and in their sovereign capacity, it follows, of necessity, that there can be no tribunal above their authority, to decide in the last resort whether the compact made by them be violated; and, consequently, as parties to it, they must themselves decide, in the last resort, such questions as may be of sufficient magnitude to require their interposition.” By questions of “sufficient magnitude,” the interpreter means those questions which involve the prerogative of that sovereignty itself, and those which are of sufficient magnitude to require its interposition, and such as are of themselves dangerous to the great purposes for which the Constitution was established; and among these great purposes we know there is expressed those of justice; right, equality, general welfare, and the blessings of liberty to us and our posterity.

On this relation of the States to each other, and to the Confederation formed by them, the people of South Carolina, then, assume that their sovereignty has never been divided; that it

has never been alienated, and that it is imprescriptible. That it has not been impaired, by the fact that they have voluntarily refrained from the exercise of certain specified functions, and that it may be exercised at their will through their own established forms. They, therefore, contend that, in the exercise of their unrestricted sovereignty, and on the great principle of the right of a sovereign State to govern itself, even when it involves the destruction of a compact which has been vitiated so as to become an imminent danger, they have the right to abrogate that compact, so far as concerns themselves, because it is dangerous to their happiness, liberty and safety.

Having ventured to present these facts and principles to your consideration, I will proceed to state the more prominent and immediate causes which have induced South Carolina to abrogate her consent to the Constitution of the United States.

As preliminary to this statement, I would say, that, as early as the year 1820, the manifest tendency of the legislation of the General Government was to restrict the territorial expansion of the slaveholding States. This is very evident in all the contests of that period; and had they been successful to the extent that some hoped, even then the line that cut off the purchase from France might have been projected eastward to the bottom of the Chesapeake, and sent Virginia and half of Tennessee, and all of Kentucky, (Virginia proper,) after she had given to non-slavery her north-western empire, to the non-slavery section. That might be the line. The policy, however, has been pushed so far as to deprive this Southern section of that line of at least seven-tenths of the acquisitions of the Government. Besides this, I would state, as preliminary, that a large portion of the revenue of the Government of the United States has always been drawn from duties on imports. Now, the products that have been necessary to purchase these imports, were at one time almost exclusively, and have always mainly been, the result of slave labor, and, therefore, the burden of the revenue duties upon imports purchased by these exports must fall upon the producer, who

happens, in this case, also to be the consumer of the imports.

In addition to this, it may be stated, that at a very early period of the existence of this Government, the Northern people, from a variety of causes, entered upon the industries of manufacture and of commerce, but of agriculture scarcely to the extent of self-support. This may have arisen from a variety of causes: among them, perhaps, an uncongenial climate, a barren soil, but a sea-coast adapted to commerce, besides an inherent tendency upon the part of the people of these latitudes to the arts of manucraft and traffic. And while, therefore, it was important that all the sources of the revenue should be kept up to meet the increasing expenses of the Government, it also manifestly became of great importance that these articles of manufacture in which they have been engaged should be subject to the purchase of their confederates. They, therefore, invented a system of duties, partial and discriminating, by which the whole burden of the revenue fell upon those who produced the articles of export which purchased the articles of import, and which articles of import were consumed mainly, or to a great extent, by those who produced the exports.

The State of South Carolina, being at the time one of the largest exporters and consumers of imports, was so oppressed by the operations of this system upon her, that she was driven to the necessity of interposing her sovereign reservation to arrest it, so far as she was concerned. This interposition, together with the rapid spread of the principle of free trade all over the world, did arrest the iniquity in the shape in which it was then presented. It could no longer be the avowed policy of the Government to tax one section for the purpose of building up another. But so successful had been the system—to such an extent had it already, in a few years, been pushed—so vast had been its accumulations of capital—so vastly had it been diffused throughout its ramifications—as seemingly to interweave the industries of the sections almost

into the life of each other. As mechanics, manufacturers, shippers, merchants, bankers, and in all the intermediary pursuits, the Northern people seem to have become almost necessary to the maintenance of the industry of the South. In these relations they had crept into every crevice of an affluent and loose economy, and made themselves so convenient to it, that we began to think them vital to it; and they grew so great and waxed so strong, as they fed and fattened on this sweating giant of the South, that, with the insolence natural to sudden and bloated power, they began to claim that the laboring monster was created for their tributary.

They have drawn from us subsidies which might have glutted the avarice of a Roman proconsul, which, in one quarter of a century, have builded up countless cities, rivaling in wealth the richest marts of the old world, and burdening every sea with their commerce, and which have covered their granite soil with palaces and smiling gardens. And yet, strange, anomalous as it may appear, it is nevertheless literally true, that while they were thus gathering all their wealth and power from this source, step by step, *latus cum latere*, with this aggregation there was growing up a determined purpose to destroy these sources of their power and grandeur. I pretend not to explain it; I relate it as history. This, gentlemen, brings me to the proximate causes which it is my mission to lay before you.

For nearly thirty years, the people of the non-slaveholding States have assailed the institution of African slavery, in every form in which our political connection with them permitted them to approach it. During all that period, large masses of their people, with a persistent fury, maddened by the intoxication of the wildest fanaticism, have associated, with the avowed purpose of effecting the abolition of slavery by the most fearful means which can be suggested to a subject race: arson and murder are the charities of their programme.

1. The representatives of these people in the Federal Legislature, acting on the same ultimate idea, have endeavored to

shape the legislation of the Government so as to deprive the slave States of political equality, by excluding them from all interest in the territorial accretions of the Government. They have succeeded to the full extent, and have decreed that there shall be no more slave States admitted to the Union.

2. A majority of the non-slaveholding States have not only refused to carry out the provisions of the Constitution and laws to protect slave property, but have made stringent laws to prevent the execution of those provisions.

3. Eight of those States have made it a criminal offence to execute the plainest provisions of the Constitution which give protection to a property furnishing \$250,000,000, annually, to the commerce of the country, and on which rests the entire order of civilization of twelve millions of people. In not one of the seventeen non-slaveholding States can a citizen of a slave State claim protection for his main property, and the person of the citizen in numerous cases has been violated, and in many of these cases the violence has resulted in murder.

4. The citizens of not less than five non-slaveholding States have invaded a slaveholding State, and proclaimed the annihilation of its people by servile insurrection; two of these States have refused to surrender the felons engaged in this invasion; and one of these States—that State which claims the most advanced civilization and refinement, which claims to represent before the world American sentiment and American principles—by the most solemn decree, through its highest constituted authority, has approved of that invasion; and large bodies of people throughout the whole of the non-slaveholding States have made votive offerings to the memory of John Brown and his associates.

5. The most populous, and by far the most potent, of the Confederates has proclaimed, for years, through its representatives in the Federal Senate, that it is a conflict of life and death between slavery and anti-slavery. This is the solemn decree, through its constituted forms, of a State containing near three millions of people, who conduct four-fifths of the

commerce of the Republic. Additional millions of people, making majorities in all the States, and many of the States by legislative action, have declared that the institution of slavery, as it exists in the Southern States, is an offence to God, and, therefore, they are bound by the most sacred duty of man to exterminate that institution. They have declared and acted upon the declaration, that the existence of slavery in the Southern States is an offence and a danger to the social institutions of the Northern States, and, therefore, they are bound by the instinct of moral right and of self-preservation to exterminate slavery.

Finally, impelled by these sacred duties to God and their consciences, and by the scarcely less binding impulses of self-protection, after years of earnest labor and devotion to the purpose, they have succeeded, by large majorities in all the non-slaveholding States, in placing the entire executive power of the Federal Government in the hands of those who are pledged, by their obligations to God, by their obligations to the social institutions of man, by their obligation of self-preservation, to place the institution of slavery in a course of certain and final extinction.

That is, twenty millions of people, holding one of the strongest Governments on earth, are impelled, by a perfect recognition of the most sacred and powerful obligations which fall upon man, to exterminate the vital interests of eight millions of people, bound to them by contiguity of territory and the closest political relations. In other words, the decree inaugurated on the 6th of November was the annihilation of the people of the Southern States. Now, gentlemen, the people of South Carolina, being a portion of those who come within the ban of this decree, had only to ask themselves: Is existence worth a struggle? Their answer is given in the Ordinance I have had the honor to submit to you.

I see before me wise and learned men, who have observed and sounded the ways of human life in all its records, and many who have been chief actors in some of its gravest scenes.

I ask, then, if in all their lore of human society, they find a case parallel to this? South Carolina has 300,000 whites and 400,000 slaves; the whites depend on their slaves for their order of civilization and their existence. Twenty millions of people, with a powerfully organized Government, and impelled by the most sacred duties, decree that this slavery must be exterminated. I ask you, Virginians, is right, is justice, is existence, worth a struggle?

I have thus recited, in general terms, the causes which dictated the action of the people of South Carolina. Were they given in detail they would embrace half the history of the Republic for half the period of its existence. From the accession of the younger Adams to this hour, the main internal history of the United States has been one untiring, unfaltering effort on the part of the non-slaveholding States to gain the control of the Federal Government—first to restrict, then to subsidize, and now to destroy, the vital interests of the slave States. Checked or baffled in one course, with the relentless energy and pertinacity of their nature, they have adopted another; retarded for a time, by the lingering but sturdy fragments of a dying patriotism among themselves, or the banded resistance of their victims, they have still held on with the fierce grip of avarice, and the mad rage of fanaticism, until God has cursed them with a triumph which has plunged this continent into civil war, and destroyed, perhaps forever, the fairest forms which human philosophy ever grafted upon the institutions of man.

Now, gentlemen, for one moment look at the converse of this picture.

For over thirty years—by every method of which we could avail ourselves, by argument, by sovereign protest, by warning, by prayer, by every energy, and every attribute we could bring to bear—we have endeavored to avert this catastrophe. In the Federal Legislature, through this long series of years, my State has given all her intelligence, all her virtue, and all her patriotism, to preserve the Constitutional Union; and that

she had intelligence, that she had patriotism, that she had virtue, is in proof here by that marble (*the bust of Calhoun*) sitting in the hall where the sovereignty of Virginia is consulting concerning the honor and the rights of Virginia. In this struggle Calhoun, McDuffie, Elmore and Butler perished almost literally in the halls of the Federal Legislature. Failing in this more than a year ago, seeing the storm impending, seeing the waves rising, South Carolina sent to this great, this strong, this wise, this illustrious Republic of Virginia, a grave commission, the purport of which, with your permission, gentlemen, I will venture to relate.

“Whereas, the State of South Carolina, by her Ordinance of A. D. 1852, affirmed her right to secede from the Confederacy whenever the occasion should arise, justifying her, in her own judgment, in taking that step; and, in the resolution adopted by her Convention, declared that she forbore the immediate exercise of that right from considerations of expediency only:

“And whereas, more than seven years have elapsed since that Convention adjourned, and in the intervening time the assaults upon the institution of slavery, and upon the rights and equality of the Southern States, have unceasingly continued with increasing violence, and in new and more alarming forms; be it therefore,

“1. *Resolved unanimously*, That the State of South Carolina, still deferring to her Southern sisters, nevertheless respectfully announces to them, that it is the deliberate judgment of this General Assembly that the slaveholding States should immediately meet together to concert measures for united action.

“2. *Resolved unanimously*, That the foregoing preamble and resolution be communicated by the Governor to all the slaveholding States, with the earnest request of this State that they will appoint deputies, and adopt such measures as, in their judgment, will promote the said meeting.

“3. *Resolved unanimously*, That a special Commissioner be appointed by his Excellency the Governor to communicate

the foregoing preamble and resolutions to the State of Virginia, and to express to the authorities of that State the cordial sympathy of the people of South Carolina with the people of Virginia, and their earnest desire to unite with them in measures of common defence."

Unsuccessful in that effort, the people of South Carolina, for the first time in over twenty years, joined with the party organizations of the day, and honestly, earnestly, and with anxious solicitude, gave her unanimous vote to that party, the success of which they believed would prolong the Union. Defeated in this last hope—having exhausted argument, protest, prayer, counsel, hope itself—the people of South Carolina calmly, unostentatiously, without clamor, but with a determination as fixed as destiny, ordained this Act, in these few simple words, which I will read to the Convention:

"We, the people of the State of South Carolina, in Convention assembled, do declare and ordain, and it is hereby declared and ordained,

That the Ordinance adopted by us, in Convention, on the twenty-third day of May, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, whereby the Constitution of the United States of America was ratified, and, also, all Acts and parts of Acts of the General Assembly of this State, ratifying amendments of the said Constitution, are hereby repealed; and that the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of 'The United States of America,' is hereby dissolved."

Even after this the people of South Carolina are not satisfied. They still seek counsel; they still seek sympathy; they still seek aid, in the protection of their rights and their honor; and for this I am here to-day.

Now, gentlemen, notwithstanding these facts I have endeavored to group before you—notwithstanding this labor, this

long-suffering, this patience I have endeavored to show you she has practiced—throughout this whole land, over all Christendom, my State has been accused of “rash precipitancy.” Is it rash precipitancy to step out of the pathway when you hear the thunder-crash of the falling avalanche? Is it rash precipitancy to seek for shelter when you hear the hissing of the coming tempest, and see the storm-cloud close down upon you? Is it rash precipitancy to raise your hands to protect your heart?

I venture to assert, that never, since liberty came into the institutions of man, have a people borne with more patience, or forborne with more fortitude, than have the people of these Southern States in their relations with their confederates. As long as it was merely silly fanaticism or prurient philanthropy which proposed our destruction, we did nothing—scarcely complained. Even when partial and most oppressive taxation, continued for years, ground us into the dust of poverty, save for a moment of convulsive struggle, we bore it patiently; even when many of our confederates, by State and municipal regulations, violated provisions of our compact vital to us, and hordes of their people, under the sanction of these regulations, robbed our property and murdered our citizens; even when, under the same sanction, bands of wild fanatics invaded slave States, and proclaimed the destruction of slavery by the annihilation of the slaveholder, and States and cities erected shrines to the memory of the felons; when one confederate demanded that we must be driven from the civilization of the age in which we live, and another sent its chief representative to defame us before the civilized world; beneath all these enormities, we continued to give our blood, our gold and our sweat to build up the grandeur and maintain the power of that Republic. And when there was added to this all that baffled avarice, malignant fanaticism and moral turpitude could devise to vilify, wrong and irritate us, we still gave our blood and treasure, and offered our hands, and called them brethren. I draw no fancy picture, I use no declamatory assertions.

There is not a man in this Convention who may not cite

twenty cases to meet every item of this catalogue. But when, at last, this fanaticism and eager haste for rapine, mingling their foul purposes, engendered those fermenting millions who have seized the Constitution and distorted its most sacred form into an instrument of our ruin, why then longer submission seemed to us not only base cowardice, but absolute fatuity. In South Carolina we felt that, to remain one hour under such a domination, we would merit the destruction earned by our own folly and baseness. We felt that if there was one son of a Carolina sire who would counsel such submission, there was not a hill-side or a plain, from Entaw to the Cowpens, from which the spirit of his offended sire would not start forth to shame him from the land he desecrated. We did not find air enough in that little State to give breath to such counsel; there was not firm earth enough there for one such counsellor to stand upon.

I pray you, gentlemen of Virginia, to pardon me for referring with some particularity to the position of my State in connection with these matters, because she has been much spoken of, and not much praised. I am here as the Commissioner of these people, certainly not their eulogist. I am sent here, as I thought, mainly because among them I have always, with some pride, proclaimed that I sprang from this soil, and because they believe that I would tell an honest, earnest story of their wrongs and trials; and if you will permit me, I will still further allude to it. Never, gentlemen, since liberty begun her struggles in the world, has a mighty drama, to be enacted on the trembling stage of man's affairs, been opened with a spectacle of purer moral sublimity than that which has been manifested in this revolution in which we are now engaged. Scarcely had this decree of our subjection been borne to our ears on the Northern breeze, than, as if from the very caverns of the earth, there rose up one voice, one voice only, from the people of South Carolina, who shouted back, resistance to the death. Their Legislature, then in session, caught that spirit, and with one voice, one voice only, proclaimed, resist-

ance to the death. The people of the State, again in their sovereign capacity, as you are here, with one voice, one voice only, ordained, resistance to the death. And now, there is not, in the borders of that little State, one man, from sixteen to sixty, who can walk or stand, who is not armed, standing ready to resist to the death. [Applause.] We are very small—very weak—but if that fire-storm with which we are threatened should fall upon us and consume us, hereafter the pilgrim of liberty, perhaps from this State, who may be searching beneath the ruins of Charleston, will find the skeleton of our sentinel standing at our sea-gate.

Believe it not, sir, that in taking this position we have been forgetful of the past, or reckless of the future. No, sir! it is the great past, and our sacred obligations to the future, which have nerved us to the act. It was the splendor of the past which dazzled our eyes, until the substance of liberty had almost slipped from our grasp. For years and years we paused, as we held up the curtain and gazed back on the unforgotten glories of the hallowed past, as we beheld that fairest temple in which liberty had ever found a shrine; that which Washington and Jefferson, Adams and Franklin, Henry and Madison, the Lees, Masons, Rutledges and Pinckneys—a conclave of demi-gods—had builded up as a tabernacle for us to dwell in forever, and consecrated it with the blood of our own fathers; that citadel of liberty; that palladium of human right; that precious muniment of human hope; that refuge of hope all over the earth; that world, won from the wilderness to God and liberty. Sir, with pious reverence we looked upon all this; and yet, with these hands, we tore it down; with these feet, we trampled it out of life; with this breath, we scattered the fragments on the winds; and, yet, we do not tremble; we are not appalled; our hands are unstained, pure, clear, unterrified, as we raise them in confident appeal to the God of Truth, Justice and Right. Armed in this panoply, we drop the curtain, and are ready to move onward through the coming scenes of this solemn drama.

Gentlemen of Virginia, the people of these Southern States are no noisy faction, clamoring for place and power; no hungry rabble, answering in blood to every appeal to brutal passion; no shouting mob, ready to take for their Government a glittering epigram, or a fustian theory. They are not canting fanatics, festering in the licentiousness of abolition and amalgamation. Their liberty is not a painted strumpet, straggling through the streets. Nor does their truth need to baptise itself in pools of blood. They are a grave, calm, prosperous, religious people; the holders of the most majestic civilization; the inheritors, by right, of the fairest estate of liberty; fighting for that liberty; fighting for their fathers' graves; standing athwart their hearth-stones, and before their chamber doors. In this fight, for a time, my little State stood alone; that little State, around whose outermost borders the guns fired at the Capital might almost be heard; whose scope of sky is scarce large enough for one star to glitter in; so small, so weak, so few, we began this fight alone against millions; and had millions been piled on millions, under God, in such a fight, we would have triumphed. But, sir, that God cares for Liberty, Truth and Right among His people—and we are no longer alone. Our own children from Florida and Alabama answered to the maternal call; and our great sister Georgia marshalled forth her giant progeny; the voice of Quitman came up out of his grave on the Mississippi; and Louisiana proved herself the offspring of the “Apostle of Liberty;” and, now, young Texas raises her giant form, and takes her place at the head of this majestic column of Confederated Sovereignties. And, sir, wherever Virginia has a son beyond her borders, his voice is known, because he speaks in the ancient tongue of his mother. Mr. President, I, one of the humblest of these sons, have told my adopted brethren—I have promised them—that before the spring grass grows long enough to weave a chaplet of triumph, they will hear the stately tramp as of a mighty host of men—a sound as if the armies of Destiny were afoot; and they will see floating above that host a banner, whose whole history is

one blaze of glory, and not one blot of shame; and coming up from that host, they will hear one voice, aye, like their own, one voice only; the resounding echo of that voice which first thundered into the hearts of your god-like sires, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" and on that banner will be written the unsullied name of Virginia. The world knows her history, and knows no history above it in the niche of fame—and knowing it, none dare doubt where Virginia will be found when her own offspring, divine liberty and justice, call her to the fight. Have I promised too much in the name of our mother? In us, the doubt would be worse than blasphemy. She will take her place in the front ranks. She will be, as she has been for one hundred years, the foremost of the world in the cause of liberty. She will stand here with her uplifted arm, not only as a barrier, but the guiding-star to an Empire, stretching from her feet to the tropics, from the Atlantic to the Pacific; grander in proportions, stronger in power, freer in right, than any which has preceded it; which will divide the rule of the Atlantic, be felt in the far-heaving waves of the Pacific, and will own the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

Mr. President, I appear before you in behalf of a portion of those who believe in this coming greatness, and who have by cruel wrong and injustice been driven from their inheritance in the mighty past; and I ask Virginia to come in the majesty of her august history, and the power of her courage and strength, and command this transcendent future.

Mr. President, I have endeavored to confine my words specifically to the matter of my own mission here. I fear, sir, that the scene and the place have deluded me to go, somewhat erratically, beyond my intention; but I have not ventured to discuss, before this Convention, those essential principles on which our order of liberty was institutionized in America, after centuries of struggle, from Runymede to Yorktown, nor their destructive violation, involved in the daring aggressions upon the confederate and absolute rights of the Southern

people, by the people and States of the North. I cannot teach this Convention. There are many men here who may truly use the words of the Greeks, "We thank God we are as wise and virtuous as our fathers." Such men cannot be taught, either the principles or the duties of liberty and truth. That knowledge, gentlemen of Virginia, is your birth-right.

I will, however, ask a few minutes more of your time, while I attempt, very rapidly, and in the most general terms, to exhibit some of the fundamental causes which the people of the South regard as justifying their belief that there never ought to be, and that there never can be, a reconstruction of the late Federal Union. Leaving out of consideration the fact, that the acquiescence, which originally founded the Union, was enforced by necessity rather than free consent, the truth seems evident, to every mind which dares to speculate advisedly on the manifest principles of that revolution we are now enacting, that they do involve fundamental and irreconcilable diversities, between the systems on which slaveholding and non-slaveholding communities may endure. We believe that these repellent diversities pertain to every attribute which belongs to the two systems, and, consequently, that this revolution—this separation—this disintegration—is no accident; that it is no merely casual result of a temporary cause; that it is no evanescent bubble of popular error or irritation; that it is no dream of philosophy; nor is it the achievement of individual ambition. It has a cause more profound and pervading than all these. It is not only a revolution of actual material necessity, but it is a revolution resulting from the deepest convictions, the ideas, the sentiments, the moral and intellectual necessities, of earnest and intelligent men. It is not only the primeval and never-dying struggle of the liberty of labor against the despotism of power; but it is that still sterner conflict which shivered Greece and disintegrated the huge and solid mass of Rome; which gathers into its contending armies all the necessities, the customs, the laws, the religions, the sentiments, and the passions, which constitute the civilization of

man. You may, as you are at this moment doing, centralize a coercive power at Washington, stronger than the Praetorian bands, when the Roman eagles shadowed the earth "from Lusitania to the Caucasus;" but you cannot come nearer coalescing the people of Virginia and the people of Vermont, the people of the St. Lawrence and the people of the Gulf, than did Rome to make one of the Gaul and the Dacian, the Briton and the Ionian. No community of origin—no community of language, law or religion, can amalgamate a people whose severance is proclaimed by the rigid requisitions of material necessity. Nature forbids African slavery at the North. Southern civilization cannot exist without African slavery. None but an equal race can labor at the North. None but a subject race will labor at the South. Destroy involuntary labor, and Anglo-Saxon civilization must be remitted to the latitudes whence it sprung.

Now, for these and other reasons, we believe the political and social organisms have assumed forms so distinct and antagonistic, that a reconciliation of them is simply an impossibility. To cite one or two instances—for I am only making suggestions for your consideration in connection with the matter in hand: In the free States, the simple, isolated, exclusive, sole political principle is a *pure democracy* of mere numbers, save a scarcely discernible modification, by a vague and undefined form of representation. In these States there can be no departure from this principle in its extremest intensity. The admission of the slightest adverse element is forbidden by the whole genius of the people and their institutions. It is as delicate in its sensitiveness as personal right in England, or slavery in Carolina. It is the vitalizing principle, the breath of the life of Northern socialism. The almighty power of numbers is the basis of all social agreement in the Northern States. A fearful illustration of this is at this moment exhibiting its results in the Government under which you are consenting to live. That Government was "instituted and appointed" to protect and secure equally the interest of

the parts. By the agency of mere numbers, one section has been restricted and another expanded in territory; one section has been unduly and oppressively taxed, and one section has been brought to imminent peril; and in this hour the people of the North are consulting whether they can subjugate the people of the South by the *right of number*.

The “government by the people” is equally the rule of the South, but the modification of the “rule of numbers” is so essential in the slave States, that it cannot co-exist with the same principle in its unrestricted form. In the South, it is controlled, perhaps made absolutely subject, by the fact that the recognition of a specific property is essential to the vitalization of the social and political organisms. If, then, you attempt to institute the rule of either form into the organism of the other, you instantly destroy the section you invade. To proclaim to the North that *numbers* shall not be absolute, would be as offensive as to proclaim the extinction of Slavery in the South. The element of property would neutralize the entire political system at the North; its exclusion would subvert the whole organism of the South.

But there is another element of disintegration and repulsion, still more potent than the geographical or the political severance. It comes of the deep-seated, but active, religious sentiment, which belongs to both people, having arrayed itself on the sides of the sections. This diversity, at this moment, is appearing, not in forms of denominational polemics, but in shapes as bloody and terrible as Religion has ever assumed since Christ came to the earth. Its representative, the Church, has bared her arm for the conflict—her sword is already flashing in the glare of the torch of fanaticism—and the history of the world tells us that when that sword cleaves asunder, no human surgery can heal the wound. There is not one Christian slaveholder here, no matter how near he may be to his meek and lowly Master, who does not feel in his heart, that from the point of that sword is now dripping the last drop of

sympathy which bound him to his brethren of the North. With demoniac rage, they have set the Lamb of God between their seed and our seed.

I have run rapidly over these diversities to show that they pervade the entire composition of the social systems of the two sections, and that, therefore, we believe the political union unnatural and monstrous; and its offspring must be abortive and fruitless, save of that fearful brood of woes which must always come from such conjunctions.

We believe, as a completely logical and reasonable deduction from these repellent attributes of the Northern and Southern sections of the late Confederacy, there have arisen those constructions of the terms of confederation, which have converted a Government of consent into a Government of force; which have driven seven States to abandon that Government; which have, for sixty days, kept loaded bomb-shells bearing on the women and children of Charleston; which have turned the Federal guns on the Capitol of Virginia; and which, if Virginia murmurs against these guns being so turned, threatens to send the ruffians of Boston and New York to re-enact the scenes of 1813 at Portsmouth and Hampton.

Where these natural and conventional repulsions exist, the conflict is for life and death. And that conflict is now upon you. Gentlemen of Virginia, you own an empire. You are very strong. You have advanced in all the arts of life, and are very wise and very skillful. You have achieved much glory, and have great virtue. You may thus drag down your mountain tops and fill up your valleys. You may unite the waters of remote oceans. You may again pull down civil dynasties and religions, and on their ruins rebuild the forms of liberty and faith. But I tell you, there is no force of human power—there is no assay of human art—there is no sanctity of human touch—which can reunite the people of the North and the people of the South as political and social equals. No, gentlemen, never; never, until by your power, your art, and

your virtue, you can unfix the unchangeable economy of the Eternal God, can you make of the people of the North and the people of the South one people.

An irresistible instinct of self-preservation has forced the cotton States to recognize this absolute and imperative diversity, and they are now proceeding to erect their institutions on its present necessity. The Northern States are also manifesting their recognition of the same diversity, by preparing, with the aid of the agents of non-slavery, known as the army and navy of the United States, to attempt the subjugation of the Southern States.

I believe the question to be decided by you, gentlemen, is, whether Virginia, like the trembling Egyptian, will skulk for shelter beneath the crumbling fragments of a past greatness, to dwell under the scourge of a haughty, but mean task-master; or whether she will step forth, and, with one voice, hush the storm of war, and keep the ancient glory of her name. The times must be far more distempered than now—indeed, prophecy dare not seek, for it can never reach that future—when Virginians will hesitate to decide this question.

Mr. President, the people of South Carolina have declared, in the language of the various compacts between them and their confederates, that they have always retained their sovereignty and independence; that they, with their confederates, did delegate certain powers to a common agent; that, by their confederates, this compact has been violated, and the Government established under it has become destructive of the purposes for which it was established; and it is, therefore, their right to abolish that Government, so far as it concerns them, and institute another. They have solemnly ordained, and are now, and have, for sixty days, been maintaining that Ordinance by arms, that all political connection with the Government of the United States is dissolved.

The admitted rule on which they have resorted to arms is, “That a violation of a perfect right, either committed or committing, or with which a people is threatened in the future,

justifies the undertaking of war—amicable means having been tried in vain. When it is evident that it would be useless to try such means, justice requires a resort to arms."

On this rule, the people of South Carolina have resorted to arms in defence of a "perfect right."

As I have stated, they have maintained this position for a reasonable time, notwithstanding their chief harbor has been blockaded and their territory invaded; they have maintained it in honor against falsehood and treachery; they have maintained it until five millions of people and six sovereign States have joined with them to form a Government, in which, in the language of the eminent citizen who has been placed in charge of the Executive Department of that Government, there can be no cause for doubt that "the courage and patriotism of the people of the Confederate States will be found equal to any measures of defence which our honor and security may require. Further obstacles may retard the progress of that Government, but they cannot long prevent the progress of a movement sanctified by its justice, and sustained by a virtuous people. Reverently let us invoke the God of our fathers, to guide and protect us in our efforts to perpetuate the principles which, by His blessing, they were able to vindicate, establish and transmit to posterity; and with that continuance of His favor ever gratefully acknowledged, we will hopefully look forward to success, peace and prosperity."

Believing the rights violated and the interests involved are identical with the rights and interests of the people of Virginia, and remembering their ancient amity and their common glory, the people of South Carolina have instructed me to ask, earnestly and respectfully, that the people of Virginia will join them in the protection of their rights and interests.

Mr. President, I have performed my mission, and do now, in the name of my Government, tender to this Convention the most cordial thanks for their honorable consideration of that mission; and, in my own behalf, I offer to the Convention and the citizens of Virginia, my heartfelt gratitude for their noble courtesy and most generous kindness to myself personally.